***Anthology***

***Summer 2011***

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**My Mother’s Kitchen**

The smell of tamales fills the air

Leftover ojas everywhere -

I can hardly wait until they’re done.

Listening to the sound of the water run -

“Help with the dishes, mija!” my mother declares.

Then out walks my grandmother with her smile so rare.

She comes over and gives me a loving tap on the shoulder.

I’ve loved this forever, even now that I’m older.

The sight of her cream colored apron -

With the mess of masa blending in –

The scene is picture perfect, except for the ivy.

The dead leaves hanging down, neglected, no one sees but me.

Finally I hear it; the sound warms my heart and brings a smile to my face.

The oven timer rings, my mouth waters for that spectacular taste -

These are the moments I’ll hold in my heart.

Generations of women and their incredible art –

**My Life as a Pair of Running Shoes…**

For as long as I can remember, running has been an important part of my life. From age six to thirteen, I was involved in several sports which required a great deal of running. In high school, I was on the track, cross-country, and soccer teams, which again required me to run. Running has not only been a means for achieving success in a particular sport, but it has been a means of escape, reflection, and forward thinking. Attending a small, private middle school, I was not aware of cross-country, as we did not have the sport. My family laughed at me when I thought of running cross-country my freshman year in high school. “Why would you want to run? Do you know that’s all they do?” they’d say when I’d mention it to them. I didn’t know what I was getting myself into, but realized that I was good. I made Varsity freshman year and had a blast with my team-members. I had participated on several sports teams in the past (skiing, tennis, soccer, swimming, basketball, volleyball, etc.) and I realized this was a sport that I didn’t have to try too hard at. It came naturally. So I kept running, made the newspaper for each race, and it made my family proud. Ironically, I used the same pair of running shoes throughout my entire high school experience. I’ve purchased several pairs since then, and they’ve taken me to extraordinary places, both physically and mentally.

Traveling, hiking, camping, biking and running are just a few of the activities I enjoy when I’m not teaching, of course. I do enjoy dressing up and going out occasionally, but my real passion is experiencing the splendors of nature. As any girl does, I enjoy shopping; however, my style is very casual. Of all the shoes in my closet, tennis shoes probably represent me the most… well, those and flip-flops of course. My tennis shoes have been with me through my first few ½ marathons, as I sweat out my previous night of drinking, and on my late night runs as I reflect on things as simple as my lesson the previous day or as colossal as my engagement that fell through. They’ve seen the lush green landscapes of the Costa Rican rainforests when I went zip-lining through the trees with my family. They’ve tromped through the snow and slippery ice on the numerous ski-vacations I went on as a teenager. They’ve struggled and slid down rocky dirt paths on hikes up San Gorgonio Peak and the numerous trails in Yosemite, Colorado, and Arizona. They’ve witnessed the scorched cobble-stoned roads of Rome, Spain, Italy, and Malta. They’ve literally observed the blood, sweat, and tears of my existence.

As tennis shoes serve a purpose, I feel that my life serves much the same purpose on multiple levels. American inventor, Charles Goodyear introduced the idea of the “sneaker” in the early 1900s as he patented the process for the vulcanization of rubber. In 1907, The Spalding company produced shoes specifically designed for the game of basketball. Keds and Converse followed in 1916-1917. Nikes, Adidas, Vans, Pumas, Converse, New Balance, and even the mirthful Sketchers Shape-ups… all these types of tennis shoes serve a purpose… they “train,” “assist,” and “comfort,” those they garnish. They can’t go anywhere or “be” anything unless they’re worn, used, and appreciated.

I have been very close to my family my entire life. We may not live around the corner from each other, as my brothers both live in Colorado now, but we will always be there for one another. I have also been in long-term relationships throughout my life. The sad thing is I usually give up running and my other hobbies in order to accommodate my significant other. When things don’t work out my running shoes are always pulled out of the closet, dusted off, and put to use again. Just as they have always been there for me, I feel that I somehow, strangely turn into them when I devote myself to someone or something. I, in turn, become the one who trains, assists, and comforts. I’ve done this in relationships, as well as in my profession. Teaching allows me to understand the needs of teenagers academically and mentally. I then spend my nights and weekends conjuring up interesting and fun ways to assist them in becoming successful adults in the future. My closest friends have understood me to be an excellent listener, nurturer, and supporter. My family has always known me to be the one to provide sympathetic and encouraging words in times of sadness.

Whether they’re a beautiful, clean, new pair, or a dirty, worn pair with holes in the soles, running shoes have and will continue to be an enormous part of my life. They may not necessarily be my shoulder to cry on, but instead, they’re the positive boost of energy I need when I’m down, the comfort to carry me through any new place or situation, the assistance I need to climb over any obstacle that comes in my way, and the trainer that’ll be there to guide me to being the best “me” I can be.

**Reflection on the Invitational Summer Institute**

As the summer institute comes to an end, I wonder how I will process all of the wonderful new strategies, ideas, and memories that I’ve created in just four short weeks. Coming into the institute I had no clue what I was getting into. It’s kind of an interesting story actually, of how I stumbled upon the program in the first place. During the end of the school year, I decided to pick up a brochure advertising the program after a very brief introduction from my district’s department chairperson. Having recently been through a few changes in my personal life freeing up most of my summer, I quickly grabbed a copy of the brochure, read it over, and decided to pursue this opportunity. Normally I teach summer school, but this was something new and I thought I should give it a shot. I am certainly glad that I did.

The summer institute is one of the best experiences a teacher can have. Its extensive list of beneficial strategies and inspirational moments makes it extremely difficult to select just one. New approaches, teaching methods, book titles, research, curriculum ideas, and technological opportunities are just a few of the amazing elements that make the program so inspiring. However, I feel that the part of the program that has really made the experience so special to me would be the friendships that I’ve made in such a short time. It’s amazing how teachers of different ages, grade levels, and content areas can come together and form such an amazing bond with each other. Everyone has had so much to offer and has been so willing to open their hearts to new ideas and opinions. We’ve shared laughs and tears together, felt overwhelmed and confused together, and have supported each other the whole way through. Through it all I never once felt like I had to hold back. I’m definitely not saying everything I had to put out on the table was the work of a genius; rather I am saying that the bonds we’ve shared have been so strong that I’ve always felt comfort and support in every situation.

When the program started, I was under the impression that it was just two weeks long. Then while sitting in class the first day and discussing the calendar, somehow I got the impression that I was mistaken and it was three weeks long. I thought to myself “… *good thing I didn’t make any other plans yet*.” Then, the second day came and I realized we would be together all day for *four* weeks out of the summer. “*Wow*…” I thought “… *what did I get myself into?”* That was quickly followed by “*well, what do I have to lose… at least I’ll be saving money not running my AC as much.”*  With the laissez-faire lifestyle that I’ve been living recently having lifelong plans suddenly change, I really had no reason to hold back. I was starting fresh and could do anything I desired, which was a first for me. Little did I know I’d end up loving the experience. As another fellow mentioned in her writing, her daughter is quiet and reserved, but when she feels comfortable will open up and embrace new opportunities. Listening to her description was like looking into a mirror for me. I too have always been reluctant to try new things. Nervous about opening up to strangers, I had to let my guard down when forming groups in the program, letting them into my life through writing and shared experiences. This was scary at first but so amazing how quickly that nervous tension disappeared.

I think it’s so important for all teachers to experience an opportunity like this. Not only does it immensely enhance your teaching practices, but it allows teachers to make connections with people who understand most what they’re going through. They listen because they know, they offer help because they understand, and they work alongside each other to seek out best practices that they all can use. All my life I’ve been lucky to have my family to continually be there to support me. They’ve listened to frustrations, celebrations, and helped me to decide what paths to take in my life. They didn’t just listen, but they’d really care, offering suggestions and guiding me through. Now that I’m teaching and the only one in my family in that profession, they still do their best to support me in every way they can. However, they don’t really know what teachers go through first hand. The summer institute allows teachers the opportunity to be with people who do understand. They want to help and can because they have been there.

The program allows teachers to be students again. That in itself is pretty amazing. Feeling the anxiety of due dates, new articles to read, and the daunting demonstration lesson to plan, allows teachers to experience what students go through. It reinforces how structure, routine, and explicit instruction is necessary to create a safe learning environment. Although once that environment is created and students know what’s expected of them, they will feel comfortable to explore their creativity and open up to one another. I think it’s important for us to understand that longing for acceptance that our students feel. Once again, the program gives us that opportunity.

Even though the program ended up being much longer than I had anticipated, I am thankful for every moment that I’ve shared with my new friends. I thank them all for their acceptance, patience, and kind hearts and I hope that we will be able to find time to continue the sharing of ideas and support in the future. As we all know, once the year starts we live busy lives with very little time to sit around and chat, but hopefully with all the new high-tech communication tools we’ve been introduced to, we’ll continue that support as much as we can. It may not be the same, but at least we can look back, laugh, and cry thinking of all the wonderful memories we’ve shared.

**Teacher Lore**

When I was in the 3rd grade, my best friend Linsday and I used to play “school” in her backyard. After our real school, we rode our bikes toward each other’s houses and “met in the middle” as we’d say. We then rode back toward her house and ran straight into her backyard where she had a big one-room playhouse. We set up all of her play tables, chairs, dolls, etc. and created a classroom. Looking back on it now, it seems kind of silly how we rushed home from school to reenact where we were just at, but it was fun to us, nonetheless. We switched off being the teacher and the student. We even used our dolls as our pretend students.

I have enjoyed going to school pretty much my entire life. I always had good relationships with my teachers and got along well with my classmates. I struggled in math and science, but I thoroughly enjoyed learning in general. When I was in the 5th grade, several of my closest friends had moved to the private school due to the decrease in challenging work at our public school. Only about 10 years old at the time, I wasn’t aware of this. I just continued on, meeting new friends and still having fun. When I would finish an assignment, my teacher would ask if I wanted to go to the first grade classroom and assist the teacher, reading with the students, organizing/grading papers, etc. Delighted, I said yes every time. Since I always wanted to be a teacher myself, this was heaven to me. I’d go home at the end of the day and tell my mom that I got to go to the first grade classroom again and help them learn to read. She liked this at first but then seemed to ask me a lot of questions. She ended up talking to my teacher and about halfway through 5th grade, I moved to St. Paul’s School, one of the private schools in town. I was nervous at first but realized several of my old friends were already there, and I seemed to fit in quickly.

Our 8th grade graduation ceremony came fast and my private school friends and I had to readjust to public school for high school. It was fun because I saw some of my elementary school friends again and was now in a bigger pool of several groups of friends. The only job I had in high school was to babysit the neighbor’s kids. I did this a lot. I’d babysit for a day, for an evening, or stay with the family for extended periods of time, either on trips or for weekends when the father was out of town and the mom had several errands to run. I loved babysitting the kids who were learning to read, write, or just enjoyed having stories read to them. I felt like I was their teacher and this made me proud.

Toward the end of high school, when everyone was thinking about college and what they wanted to study, I’d mention that I wanted to be a teacher. Coming from a family completely devoid of teachers, I didn’t always receive the responses I had anticipated. My dad’s side of the family is all very well educated and primarily consists of doctors and lawyers. My mom’s side of the family worked hard throughout their lives but didn’t have the privileges of going to college. My parent’s rule about college was that we could go to college and be completely supported, or we could stay home and get a job to pay for rent, utilities, etc. My two older brothers were both in college by the time I graduated high school, one in Colorado and one in Santa Barbara. They were both proficient in science and math, which I wasn’t. They’d tell me, “Why do you want to be a teacher?” “You won’t make much money,” and my least favorite, “Those that can’t do, teach.” Despite what my brothers said, my parents always encouraged me to do whatever I wanted, but to make sure I got an education.

Attending SDSU, I felt a bit lost with no one I knew going in the direction of teaching. Even all of my dorm friends were doing other things. It was strange how no one I knew wanted to be a teacher, but yet this was still the only profession I could really see myself doing in the future. After completing my GE requirements, I began meeting other students in my English courses who enjoyed literature as much as I did, and even some who were planning to become English teachers. Finally I began to feel like I was part of a group and I was working toward a common goal.

During the last year at SDSU, while observing teachers in classrooms and completing responses about the best practices and strategies of teaching, I attempted to get part-time jobs that would help me gain experience working with children. All the jobs I had throughout college at this time were in retail, serving, filing, etc. I now wanted to have experience that would look good on a resume if I wanted a job in education. Before graduation, I was asked to participate in a group interview where I would teach a demonstration lesson, choosing from a lesson in a book they provided. I’d have to teach it to a group of complete strangers who were either applying for the same job or doing the hiring. I agreed and was very nervous, especially because this lesson was a math lesson and I hated math. If chosen for the job, I’d be teaching students who needed extra help passing the CAHSEE in math during the summer. To my surprise, I did well in my demonstration lesson, got the job, and felt semi-confident to teach that summer with Adelante, the program that I now was a part of.

Adelante was a program that wasn’t run directly through the school; rather we were college students “hired to help.” That meant that we were on a closed campus, using the bungalows. There was no administrator on duty or any other form of management for that matter. We simply had four hours a day with a group of about 35 sophomores/juniors and were told to teach from the CAHSEE prep book. The materials didn’t arrive until the third day. For the first two days, I had a room of desks, a marker board with no markers, no pencils, no paper, no teaching experience… nothing. I simply had 35 kids in the rough inner-city area of San Diego where I had never been to, even though I had lived in San Diego for five years. This was definitely not a tourist area of San Diego. With absolutely nothing to do with them, I asked for advice from the neighbor in the next bungalow. He suggested playing a game with them. I decided to have the kids put the chairs in two rows, back to back, and we’d play musical chairs. Thank goodness for the old, dusty boom-box I saw in the corner of the room. As we got ready to play, the kids started emptying their pockets of chains, metal belt buckles, etc. and asked me to hold them. I was in shock. The only directions I was given was to keep the kids in the room for four hours with one break for a snack, and not to let them out until noon. I wasn’t prepared for these kids who all knew each other and were bigger than I was with metal objects in their pockets that could easily be used as weapons. Those first two days were brutal. One desk was thrown and I had to do my best to keep two kids from fighting. Before the bell rang at noon, I literally had to stand in the doorway and hold them back and then carefully try to stay standing as they all raced down the platform. All that was left when they were gone was myself, standing in that empty classroom, and a complete mess to clean up every day. Even though we had no paper to write on, they sure managed to find some to write horrible notes and draw atrocious pictures on that they’d leave scattered around the room for me to find.

The materials finally arrived on the third day and I could actually start teaching. Things went a bit smoother, but with no administration or anyone besides the college “helpers” who were teaching, I was realizing that teaching may not be the best decision for my future. The other teachers had all been through the credential program at least, and most had actual teaching experience. They hired me, explaining that this would be excellent experience and that they were sure I’d do well. That summer I went back to SDSU, since I still had access to their career services, and asked to speak with a counselor. She had me take several aptitude tests to determine if teaching was the right profession for me. All signs still pointed to “yes.” She suggested that I give it a second chance. Maybe Adelante was just a bad program for me. That’s when I moved back to the valley.

I moved home to Visalia and attended Fresno State for the credential program. I completed my first semester student teaching at Green Acres Middle School in Visalia and the second semester at Sunnyside High School in Fresno. Each of my experiences teaching here has been wonderful. Of course I had difficulties with a student every once in a while, but overall I had direction, support, and encouragement ever since I came back home. I’m not saying it was San Diego that was the problem… I just know that I wasn’t ready for what I was thrown into. I know that teaching takes a lot of preparation and organization in the classroom, school-wide and district-wide. The program I chose to be a part of that summer had none of this. I wasn’t ready to jump in head-first with sophomores and juniors on my own, with no experience, no materials, no administration, and in a subject area I hated, nonetheless.

Looking back, I will always be thankful for that counselor at SDSU who encouraged me not to give up on my dream. I wish I remembered her name so I could thank her. That summer I cried each day as I picked up all of the horrific notes and pictures the students would leave behind for me. Most were even using me as the subject. I had never seen such graphic, crude pictures in my life, and somehow I would face them the next day, not knowing who the artist of these terrible sights was. I now understand that the situation I was in is not what teaching is all about… survival. Thankfully I am now able to teach students to appreciate life and learning so that they may be polite and productive citizens of their communities. To this day, I share that story with my students and explain how that single experience rattled my life-long goal of becoming a teacher. Had I run away at that difficult time, I would’ve never made it to where I am today. That single experience however, has given me the strength to keep going when things get tough and the determination to carry through. Just as that counselor at SDSU helped me to find my path, I hope to offer the same guidance to my own students. As my family sees me smiling in pictures with students bigger than I am and hears me telling stories of all the interactions I’ve had with them, they tell me how proud they are of me. None of us knew what teaching would be like, and I am thankful I am finally able to bring that experience into our family.

***L. Ayanna Evans*** *was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. She relocated to the central valley with her family. She is the mother of three brilliant children. She enjoys reading, writing, music, and life. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from University of California, Santa Cruz. She received her multiple subject credential from California State University, Fresno through the CalState Teacher Program. She is an educator at Central Union Elementary School in Lemoore, California. She hopes her unique teaching style will empower her students to reach their maximum potential.*

**My Life as the Ocean**

The ocean--the potential of tranquility and the mystery of power provide a continual refuge. The cool breeze emanating from the ocean’s surface as well as the calming hush as its waves hit the shore is something to behold. I can remember watching the waves and the guests enjoying the majesty of it all. I briskly race ahead of the power of the oncoming wave and sit just beyond what I believe to be her boundaries; and once again, I am caught up in a moment’s notice to be both shocked and thrilled by the majesty of it all. At times I am overwhelmed by her power; yet I enjoy every minute of her magnificence.

I am the ocean and I freely engage in an exchange between the various layers inherent within me. I have a significant impact on the biosphere unbeknownst to many. I am both photic and aphotic —able to produce in the presence or absence of light; obvious and inconspicuous both coexisting in perfect harmony. Nevertheless, influencing life as we know it in several areas; affecting generations in her wake. Just as I influence students in my role as an educator—impacting the lives of generations; resulting in the manifestation of latent potential.

I, like the ocean have an effect on the atmosphere. Regardless of the climate, my effectiveness as an educator is limitless. How life is perceived, determined, and lived is influenced by what is reflected or perhaps projected from us. I, like the ocean can be awe inspiring or overwhelming all at the same time. To my students I have become the one who encourages them to not fear the unknown, yet help them to embrace their individual potential that so often lies deep within.

Ahhh! Potential—can’t you feel its moisture; taste it on your lips; like the salt granules that permeates across the ocean floor. **P**otential like salt located on the ocean floor is a preservative of individual greatness. She too cannot be contained for she is much too powerful. **Lady P**, hey, she is like a tsunami that can devastate those who dare to challenge her. She displaces the slothful and reluctant. The disturbances she creates occur above and below her sphere of influence. Lady P is often unnoticed until she reaches shallow water which cannot contain her capabilities.

After a recent visit to the beach I determine that we are still inspiring hope and awe--still saying ***come, bask, and enjoy all that we have to offer***. Yeah man-- the reflections of us are magnificent. What we deposit on the shore and in the biosphere is picturesque and essential.

**Dearest Tonya**

Dearest Tonya,

How have you been lately? I am writing this letter to you to discuss what you have been calling your “new normal”. How is it going since you have been working on your new normal, especially with our most recent holiday events? I know that establishing this new normal may seem to be difficult. I cannot even begin to imagine all that you have to consider since you do want to make the transition smooth for your young people. It will eventually; hopefully, iron itself all out. Try talking with the children and see if they have any suggestions. Girl, you know they are all so brilliant.

By the way, have you started to live this new normal for yourself? Remember, you too deserve to be happy and to enjoy some of all that life has to offer. You always give, give, give; now, take some time to live. Were the festivities of the past few days too much for you! Did you chat with your young men? How is Miss Lady? They are fine, they will be fine. Girl, remember what momma said, “What don’t kill you will always make you stronger!” This is true. I have been watching you; you aint dead yet so, be strong!

Girl, stop over-thinking and doubting yourself! Your young men are handling everything? You know they are good? They will all managing and well; trust me. We were fine—right?! Youngsters have a resiliency about them that is amazing. I hope they were able to enjoy the holiday’s festivities without thinking about their dear mom. Do you think they had an enjoyable Fourth of July? Or do you think they woke up thinking of a family that was once and is in flux? Girl, you know me always one too many questions.

How is the baby girl? Is she just as feisty as always? Yeah, she is I already know the answer—she is too much like her mommy. I don’t mean this in a negative way (smile). What did the two of you do this holiday? I hope you didn’t just sit at home and internally mope, externally saying some stuff about needing to rest on your day off, making excuses for not living your life. Girl, stop this nonsense and live! Enjoy all that life has to offer—ya heard me?! ‘Cause singleness is a good thing; many times much better than being married. Yeah, I already hear your sarcasm—easy for you to say laid up with who knows. Will I do know and it isn’t all that it is cracked up to be! Being here in the moment and not fully enjoying it; worst even than a bad marriage, because you have nothing to fall back on and no one feels sorry for you. Not that I feel sorry for you because; you, my friend, seem good. You are good right?! Let me know if I can do thing, I got you always.

You are getting all adjusted, right? How is the home buying and selling going? Much too slow for you I bet. You are always moving, pushing forward. Girl, like Jill Scott said on Monique, “Experience where you are right now. Waddle in the moment, lay all in it so you can get up and move forward.”

Slow down, don’t worry; “all things work together for good to those who love the Lord”—something like that, right. I know you thought I forgot all about that but I still remember a lil somethin’ somethin’! Yes, I too do hear you more times than you think. Here is another one to remember—“be anxious for nothing, but in all things give thanks.” Girl, just to blow your mind—“weeping may endure for a night but joy comes in the morning!”

Oh, yeah—I got you**.**  Stay strong my friend. I love you always. Holla at a sistah some time.

Love Ya,

Me

**Janet Hubner**

**Idea Bank – Reading and Writing in Science Class**

I am a member of the “Reading, Writing, and Thinking” committee at Computech. We provide professional development for the staff. I signed up for that committee because I demand a lot of writing from my students, even though I am a science teacher. I thought that my experience with writing in a content area would be a positive contribution to the committee. Research says that asking students to write is both effective teaching and effective assessment. Still, when I review composition books over the weekend or bring 200 essay tests home, I wonder if I have made the best use of time. I want to make sure writing time is truly learning time.

How do you do that?

Give students an audience.

I encourage my students to write for themselves when they take notes from the text. Students write with and for each other when they craft the summaries at the bottom of their notes. Of course I am the audience for their essay answers on quiz days. Student created science content posters are the genre produced for the audience of all classroom visitors – including parents. When they write children’s science books, some students have a particular child in mind. Other students give their book to one of our neighboring elementary schools. But for whom have they been writing all those lab reports? There truly are authentic audiences out there. This year I am hoping to inspire students to write for the judges and the attendees at the Fresno County Science Fair and the UC Davis Science Symposium.

This summer I read about and researched lab write –ups. I think I was looking for that magic lesson that would make it easy to teach this process. Instead I learned how hard it is to write anything, and that all writers need time to re-read and revise. My student scientists need to see me writing and editing in my lab book. They need to see lots of models. They need to evaluate their labs with reference to a rubric and in comparison with the work of their peers. They need to read their labs out loud in order to hear how their own work flows. And then they need to revise again. They need to practice all parts of lab reports, and poster presentations multiple times before they get to their published effort. With practice, a formal communicative genre that is the norm in high school, college, and in science journals will become a familiar part of their repertoire.

If I can fight the good fight and stand up to the pressure to move on and bury more material, then my student researchers will have the time needed to become experts. My students will be able to proudly present their projects, papers, and posters to a wide audience.

**Mother’s Kitchen**

June’s morning fog roles back to the bay.

My Mother’s first kitchen was that high grey kitchen in El Cerrito.

Grandma Nelson’s kitchen.

Now, my Mother’s kitchen has become Kristine’s kitchen.

The one Grandpa Nelson built for Mom and Dad.

In June, morning fogs leave the kitchen window and retreat towards El Cerrito.

Kristine sits at the tile table, those iron legs curve down to the floor

The grey scuff marks on the linoleum remind her of limits.

Those light curved fiberglass chairs

They have transparency and movement.

Look through the glass, look through the fog

Lawn, dog, horse pasture, high tension electric wires, the vegetable garden, and the driveway

Dad would have driven up that drive way hours ago

Drive that white ranch wagon

Drive with a cup of coffee between his knees and a plate of pancakes on the steering wheel.

Kristine takes the bread out of the oven.

Cut a few slices, make some toast, grab a couple of the little green and red stippled apples for lunch.

The fog will be gone by the time Mom is able to get out of bed.

Even on a good day she can’t use the bread saw anymore.

Cut a few more slices for her.

It is time to go out into the foggy morning, grab a green and white Miramonte Matador sweat shirt.

Maybe there is time to water that dying African violet – or is it over-watered already?

Cheerleaders never walk all the way to school.

Who will pick her up?

What was due to today in History?

***Jessica Galvan*** *teaches first grade at Jackson Elementary in Selma. She has been teaching there for over 9 years. Jessica taught Kindergarten for three of those years; then went on to teach first grade students. In 2008, she was a nominee in Selma Unified for the Teacher of the Year award. Jessica attended the very same school as a child. It is for this very reason that she has such an interest in school activities. She participates in both the fall and spring carnivals, and attends parent club meetings at her school. She wants what’s best for the students.*

**My Mother’s Kitchen**

Every year the lonely green avocado sits on the cluttered kitchen counter

As it waits to be diced into pieces.

It’s about to be turned into deliciously delightful dip.

It’s going to meet its maker…the chip!

Yum! Guacamole!

The uncooked turkey is positioned near the sink because

It’s being thoughtfully prepared with melted butter and just the right seasonings.

The anticipation of it finally resting on the table is…

Almost too much to bear because the taste is delectable!

My sister comes in from a difficult day at work,

Grabs an ice cold Pepsi to drink…she reluctantly sits down at the kitchen table

And begins to dutifully chop celery and slice olives for the scrumptious stuffing.

She would much rather be at home, but she knows this is her fate every year.

The oven fills the room with the smell of burnt toast

That will be portioned into tiny bits to be used for the homemade stuffing.

The homemade stuffing that prevails over all others!

Every year, it is enjoyed by everyone on Thanksgiving.

My Dear Elementary Teaching Friends,

I realize that I’m supposed to send a postcard, but I have so much to write, that I decided to send a letter! I hope that all of these words don’t discourage you from reading it. This has been quite a summer. All of those horrible summer mornings waking up at 6 am, hitting snooze on the alarm clock, getting ready, and driving 30 minutes to Fresno were actually rewarding! Can you believe it?

By participating in the San Joaquin Valley Writing Project, I gained so much knowledge. Not just about helping students write, but about myself as a reader and writer as well. Being surrounded by a community of learners was very beneficial. It was also validating to know that what I’m doing in the classroom is worthwhile…using my students’ own writing as examples, going through the writing process, sitting in the “Author’s Chair,” and making writing meaningful for each student. It is these strategies that actually help a student become a better writer.

I have always viewed my students as readers and writers. Because I teach first grade, I know that modeling is a huge part of anything that I ask my students to do. But, often times, after modeling writing, I would then cover my piece so that they wouldn’t copy what I wrote. With the help of Kelly Gallagher, I learned that it’s okay for that writing to be up there. That’s the starting point for some students…for those reluctant writers it would be very useful. Geez, why didn’t I think of that? I know why. It’s because there is a lot of, for lack of a better word, “management” at school where teachers like to think that they have the best practices. So, they tell you how to teach, and it’s just the way that they’ve been teaching for the past 20 years or more. But in reality, you take what you’ve learned, make it better by supporting it with research, and then share with them!

So this leads me to research. I want my students to read and write every day; that means that I should too. Don’t get me wrong, I love to read. I will read the newspaper, magazines, and if there is a book regarding the latest chick flick, I’ve got it! I call it mindless reading, because it doesn’t really need a lot of reflection, but it’s so pleasurable. I need to read more “educational stuff.” The research papers, the essays, the books that give a deeper meaning to what we do or should do in the classroom and why we should do it. That’s what will help me validate what I’m doing for my students, plus it will help improve my practices. Don’t get me wrong, I do read research relevant to my grade level, but I think that I’ve lost touch…for many reasons, but I’ve read so much this summer while attending the SJVWP, and it’s been extremely significant. We’ve discussed what was read, and related it to personal experiences. I’ve been introduced to many authors that have a passion for writing. It’s because of that passion that writing can be such a controversial subject. Writing can and should be very personal. I have to remember that with my students, even though they come to me at 5, 6, or 7 years of age; they have feelings too. Feelings that can be incorporated into their writing.

I’ve always known that reading and writing go hand in hand, but the reassurance from reading the research is what makes it come to the forefront. It reminds me of what’s crucial for students, and for me. If I want my students to write daily, then I must be their example. When I was younger I loved to write. I had a diary, I wrote creative stories on the computer, I wrote letters to people; I could always express my feelings in writing so much better than speaking. So, what happened? I think that I just got caught up in the routine of things. Wake up, go to school, go to meetings, come home, maybe eat dinner with my husband, prep for the next day, go to sleep…then it starts all over again. Attending the San Joaquin Valley Writing Project has enlightened me in that I need to adjust my routine. I need to make some time for my own writing, my own reflections. Whether it be about how the day went with the students or just to get my feelings on paper. And, yes, I mean paper even though the SJVWP has opened up a whole new world of technology to me.

Ahh, technology. Isn’t it great? Attending the summer institute enabled me to experiment with technology. Hey, I even talked my husband into buying a laptop! Now, I know that I’m not the best at it, but I’ve become accustomed to it. It’s not like I’ve never touched a computer before, but I’ve learned so many other ways that the students can use it for writing. I am most definitely going to use some of the ideas in my classroom next year. I could use Prezi to introduce topics or Wordle for getting key words out there; I really want an interactive whiteboard though – Now wouldn’t that be great?! I’m sure that the students will love it because most of them are raised on technology, and those that aren’t will be exposed to it. I believe that attending school and writing in the classroom will be so exciting for them if technology is involved.

All in all, I had a great summer. I was able to meet and collaborate with some really great teachers from around the Valley. There were so many committed teachers from Visalia to Oakhurst. Grade levels ranging from Kindergarten to college. It was not only inspiring, but refreshing to learn all the different perspectives. To get ideas from the various demo lessons. Attending the San Joaquin Valley Writing Project has liberated me from the conundrum of regular reading and writing. It has unleashed the inner reader and writer out of me. So, in the end the summer institute isn’t just going to help me help my students, it’s actually helped me!

With Lots of Thought,

Jessica

**Laura Walls** teaches Earth Science and GATE Biology at McLane High School in Fresno, California. She loves integrating technology and writing into her science curriculum. Last year, her students wrote and designed animated public service announcements and created faux Facebook pages for characters in the movie GATTACA. Laura has three adult sons and a high school age daughter. She loves gardening, fossil and rock collecting and watching the humming birds feed at her kitchen window. She even has a lemon tree in her back yard.

The New Digital Divide

There is a new digital divide developing within education. The most pressing issue is no longer the digital haves vs. the digital have-nots. The issue has become digital immigrants vs. digital natives. Natives usually play an integral role in assisting immigrants with learning customs of a new culture. This is not the case in the education world. In education, the digital immigrants must train and teach the digital natives. This dichotomy is creating a great deal of tension.

Students at every grade level want to be engaged with technology in the classroom, just as they are engaged with technology outside of the classroom. I teach high school sciences in an inner city school in a large district. When my Biology students started working on a mock Facebook project, my Earth Science students came to me and said, “Can we do a *Facebook* project, too?” When my Earth Science students were making animated public service announcements for a symposium, my Biology students came to me saying, “Can we use *Go!Animate*, too?” Surprisingly, students must be talking about what is going on in their classes. And somehow, *my* lessons involving technology became a topic of teenage discussion. How often is it that students talk about what they did in class today? And how rare is it that a student even thinks to himself, “I want to do that activity”? Students are engaged by technology – but not technology for drill and practice. They **want** to use technology for authentic, creative activities. They **need** practice reading, writing, analyzing, synthesizing and forming opinion. Technology can marry the two together if digital immigrants will provide the opportunities.

I was amazed recently when my administrator commented that I am one of the only teachers at my school who consistently and successfully integrates technology with my lessons. Am I the only one? When students use technology at home and in some classes but then sit at a desk in a classroom with an overhead projector and chalkboard, they frequently disengage. The student plops his head on the desk, thinking “What? I have to take notes and listen to a boring lecture? I wish I was home on XBOX Live or Facebook.” That’s when the student slips out the smart phone from his pocket and posts “This English class is hecka whack” to his Facebook page. Before he realizes, the teacher is at his desk, open hand extended, asking for him to give up the phone.

Wouldn’t it be better and more engaging for students if the teacher said, “use your phone to post to our class Wiki about what you’ve been reading for SSR? If you don’t have a phone with internet, I’ll bring you an iPad.” This gives students a chance to enter into the “conversation of their culture1” using the technology of their culture.

We digital immigrants need to recognize that it is OK

**not** to be the expert.

Yet many teachers quiver at the thought of bringing out cell phones in class or using easily stolen iPads. There are plenty of strategies for avoiding theft and administrators are becoming friendlier when it comes to using students’ personal technology for a classroom task. Still, many teachers are hesitant to bring technology into the classroom because they fear that they will no longer be the expert in the room. Here is where we digital immigrants need to recognize that it is OK **not** to be the expert.

When we offer students a chance to enter into the “conversation of their culture1” using the technology of their culture, they **will** be the experts. The excitement of “I know more than my teacher” spills over into engagement, effort and empowerment. When students realize that they know something the teacher doesn’t, they will frequently stand up and take a leadership role assisting peers. I’ve seen it happen in my class.

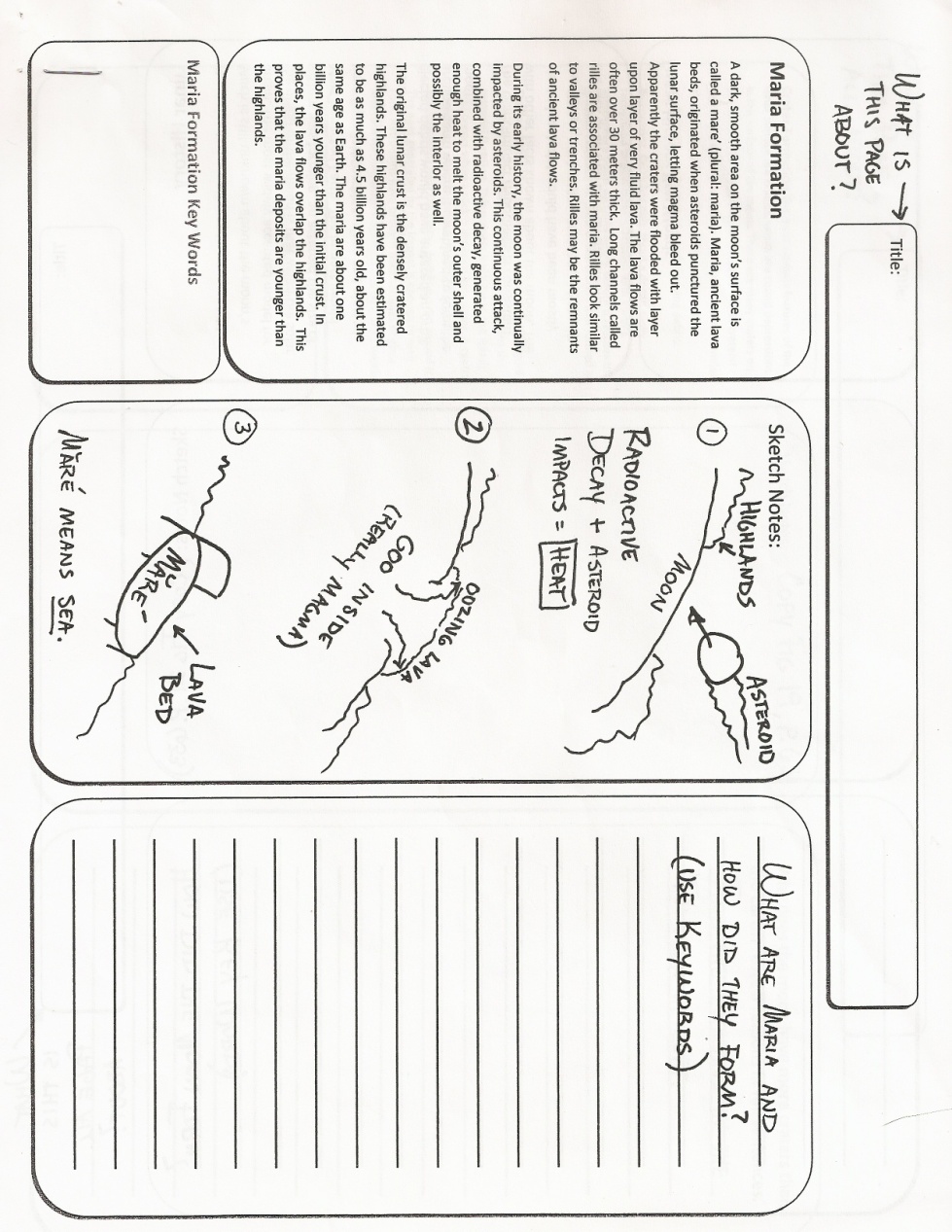
Engaged students work hard. Engaged students, who **need** practice reading, writing, analyzing, synthesizing and forming opinions, will work hard on a task when it involves using the technology they **want** to use for authentic, creative activities. We digital immigrants need to create the authentic opportunities for students to engage in our content, and then stand back and learn from them.

1Gardner, H. (2004). *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*. New York: Basic Books. p. 263.

**The Value of Sketch Notes for English Language Learners**

“OK, class . . . we’re going to take some notes.” Instead of the expected groans, my ELL (English Language Learner) students respond with anticipation because I use a different style of notes that I call *sketch notes*. Sketches in science help students visualize processes but I take sketching beyond that. I create visual devices encoded with meaning that students can use to pack concepts away into long term memory.

In my early days of teaching, I used many sketching activities for students, but it wasn’t until I was introduced to the SIOP Model (*Structured Observation Interaction Protocol*, Echevarria, Bogt, Short) for English Language Learners that I learned to incorporate sketching with reading, listening, analysis and writing.

One of my favorite lessons using sketch notes teaches students about Earth’s moon. This lesson was developed with a colleague, Amanda Bertram, during a SIOP training session through Fresno Unified School District. I started with a set of process sketches that I used to teach the concepts of the Giant Impact Hypothesis of moon formation, crater formation and lunar maria formation (See Figure 1). Based on the SIOP strategy of modifying text for English Language Learners, my colleage and I sat in the workshop and created a five-step sketch notes process that involves concurrent silent reading and listening as text is read aloud, analyzing for key words, process sketching, and writing about the new concept. Students must reflect on the content and create a consice, descriptive title for the work.

This five step process is a great improvement over my original attempts at sketch notes because it involves more language. “The language processes – reading, writing, listening and speaking – are mutually supportive,” according to Hinkel as quoted in the SIOP Manual (page 146). Hinkel suggests that “although the relationships among the processes are complex, practice in any one promotes development in the others.”

Typically, sketch note lessons are based on images I create anddraw on the white board. Students copy my sketch into the middle panel of the worksheet. I pack the image full of detail and device. Students might miss the power of the memory device if I asked them to create their own sketch.

Research in neuroscience backs up this practice. Judy Willis, board certified neurologist, educator and teacher-consultant with the South Coast Writing Project explains that “multiple sensory-intake systems such as talking, writing, moving, and listening enhance long-term memory.” Willis describes how her neuroimaging studies demonstrate that multisensory intake activates multiple neural networks. The brain duplicates the information and stores it in “multiple long-term memory circuits (Willis).” When the brain seeks to retrieve stored information, it recovers information more easily. Employing multiple methods of language and image processing, like sketch note activities, “increases efficiency of information retrieval and durability (Willis).”

Roy Takayama has been promoting the use of sketching to promote higher order thinking since the early 1990s. In his article, “Thoughts about thinking: The skills of thinking (1993),” he explains that “being able to understand a diagram, chart, or graph is not enough. Students must be able to create them in their minds, or if not in their minds, on paper.” Takayama suggests that “the organization of information into structures allows [students] to see relationships and within these relationships they can see patterns and trends.” By putting pencil to paper in order to depict challenging scientific concepts with both artistic renderings and written descriptions, students will process deeply and more easily recall the concepts presented.

In one lesson, English Language learners listen to text read aloud fluently by a native speaker, read silently and analyze text for key terms, create nonlinguistic representations of concepts and then take ownership of the concept by concisely explaining the process in writing. This style of lesson engages students in visualizing and actively

*In Earth Science, I’ve used Sketch Notes to teach these concepts:*

* *Hypothesis vs. Theory*
* *Nebular Hypothesis of Solar System Formation*
* *Earth’s Layers (Crust, Mantle, Core)*
* *Moon Formation*
* *Lunar Maria Formation*
* *Crater Formation*
* *Old Science Guys of Early Astronomy*
* *Nuclear Fusion*
* *Lithosphere vs. Asthenosphere*
* *Atmosphere Layers with Sheriff Atmo*

*In Biology, I’ve used Sketch Notes to teach:*

* *Cell Organelles*
* *Prokaryotic vs. Eukaryotic Cells*
* *DNA to Protein*

creating concrete images to represent new and difficult scientific concepts (Takayama, 1993). Teaching new science concepts “through art analysis helps students express in language the structures and relationships that are visualized and ‘consolidate meaning through multiple sources’ (Fisher, Frey, 2004).

Sketching scientific processes is a good start toward helping students digest difficult and abstract concepts, but adding oral and written language development to the lesson increases rigor and assists English Language Learners with buidling language skills and higher-order thinking processes simultaneously.

Echevarria, Jana, MaryEllen Vogt, and Deborah Short. *Making Content Comprehensible for Secondary English Learners: the SIOP Model*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2010. Print.

Takayama, R (1993a. September). Thoughts about thinking: The skills of thinking. Retrieved July 2011: [www.aimsedu.org/resources/articles/files/ThoughtsAbout Thinking.pdf](http://www.aimsedu.org/resources/articles/files/ThoughtsAbout%20Thinking.pdf)

Willis, Judy. "Writing and the Brain: Neuroscience Shows the Pathways to Learning - National Writing Project." *National Writing Project - Improving the Teaching of Writing in the Nation's Schools*. Web. 28 June 2011. <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/3555>.

*Lupita Fuentes currently works as a Teacher on Special Assignment at Parent University. She has been a teacher for the past 12 years. Lupita’s passion has been helping students and parents learn new information. Teaching them how to use new learning strategies is invigorating to her. The most rewarding parts of her job have been seeing her students pass the CAHSEE and graduate with a high school diploma. Aside from teaching, Lupita enjoys spending time with her family. When Lupita does have free time, she enjoys gardening, cooking, and baking. She likes making chocolate chip cookies, cupcakes and ice cream cakes for family and friends.*

**Kitchen poem**

My lovely mother,

Is the best cook ever

She can make pork chops,

Chicken, beef and lamb chops too,

When we get together for family gatherings,

We know it’s time for some good ‘ol family grub,

My mom would win hands down,

If she had a throw down,

With Rachel Ray, Paula Dean or Bobby Flay,

For the holidays my mom will announce,

Red Velvet and Chessecake are in the house,

And I know these memories will last forever in my heart.

**Teaching Strategy**

Have you ever felt like your students were a little confused after a topic or lesson? Have you ever had students ask you the same question after a lesson? If you answered “yes” then you should try using this strategy called the “Muddiest Point.” It provides information on what students find confusing or unclear about a lesson or topic. Educators use it to find out which points are most difficult for students to learn. They use it to guide their teaching decisions about which topics to review and how much time should be spent on the topic of conversation.

I have used this strategy many times and found it to be very useful. Soon after a Modern World History lesson I have asked students to answer the following question “What was the muddiest point in the Industrial Revolution?” Another way to phrase this question is “What was unclear about this lesson?” When working with English as a Second Language Learners (ELL) you could ask “What was unclear about this lesson?” A third variation is “What was hard to understand in this lesson?” I have seen other variations such as “What questions do you have?”

I spend about five minutes reading their information and it’s exciting. Sometimes I go back and re-read their responses to ensure I understood their feedback. I look for commonalities and place the papers in different sections or piles. Papers that have common responses are placed in one pile. Papers that are difficult to read are placed in another pile. You can offer extra credit or simply make this an exit activity. Students can hand you their papers as they walk out the door at the end of the class period. After reading their answers, I will use the information to guide my next class lesson. It is best used at the end of a lecture. As an educator, it provides me with an opening for the following class lesson.

This strategy is easy and fun to implement at any grade level. The Classroom Assessment Technique (CAT) provides you with instant results. This technique provides a high volume of information without investing a lot of time and energy. It can be implemented with any subject area on the spur of the moment. It is non-threatening and it provides you with information from an entire class period - instantly. Students don’t have to put their name on their paper. For students who are shy and don’t ask questions, this is a safe alternative for having them participate.

This CAT can be used in classes where large amounts of information are being presented such as mathematics, statistics, economics, health science, and natural science. It is probably used in these subjects more frequently because there could be several “muddy points” for students.

If you use this technique your students will pay attention more closely, and it will develop their memory recall skills and their ability to concentrate. It will also improve their listening, and study skills. Using this strategy will help them learn facts, terms, concepts, and theories.

This strategy has been very beneficial for me as an instructor. It has helped me identify students who may be struggling or who could help other students in the class. I can also see if their writing and spelling are on grade level. This is just one of the many strategies that I have used to assess students’ knowledge and it’s fabulous.

**Dr. Meta Schettler**, a poet and professor, is originally from the east coast (Connecticut) and currently teaches Africana Studies at California State University, Fresno. Her research interests include African-American literature as well as South African culture and politics, especially the anti-apartheid movement. She loved the writing project this summer and is eager to try new techniques with her students, especially new digital writing tools like wikis and Wordle.

**Reflections on our ISI, “We Are the Wordle”**

“The landscape of the heart cannot appear on a map because it belongs to the individual artist.

It is that individual landscape with its unique features, a vision unlike any other, that we

want our student writers to share.” (Spandel, 125)

I’ve learned so much from this summer’s writing project that I didn’t think it would fit in a traditional prose essay so I decided to create a Wordle from my notes to begin. <http://www.wordle.net/show/wrdl/3849343/summerinstitute>

All of our readings affirmed the fact that writing is complex, and that we need multiple strategies to engage our students and guide them in the process of improving their writing. There are no easy answers, and there is no singular technique that works for everyone. We learn what we can by doing, and not by talking about it, which reminds me of our mini-field trip to the Gary Soto museum at Fresno City College. It was wonderful to meet an acclaimed Fresno poet and hear him talk about his journey and his work. What a powerful space!

From reading multiple essays on the National Writing Project’s e-anthology, I became a little jealous of other writing projects who took field trips to inspire their writing. I read posts related to day trips in the Santa Cruz area, touring Carl Sandburg’s home in North Carolina, and hiking up Spirit Mound, a place revered by the Dakota people and visited by Lewis and Clark. Maybe in the future our own writing project could find a way to include a retreat to wrap up our institute and give us some time for renewal, reflection and gathering. Here is a poem from one of the Dakotan fellows after visiting Spirit Mound,

Drenched in the endless isolation of the naked prairie,

watching cloudy sunsets in open spaces,

we fill the void of the naked plains

with

culture and wisdom

We drink fresh mornings, light blue

beside the fawns, ponies, little coyotes

We are the shining valleys,

the rising of the ground to the

mound of Little People or of

Spirits

We are corn and sunflowers and

herds of buffalo

milling about on the wide-open prairie

(Kiera Frey, Dakota Writing Project, <http://www.nwp.org/cs/ea/view/dt/62823>)

Surely, Yosemite or Sequoia National Park might be able to compete with that!

Finally, my favorite reading by far was Vicki Spandel’s chapter from *The 9 Rights of Every Writer*, “The Right to Go Beyond Formula.” How she described writing really resonated with me.  I’ve never been taught to use formulas in my own writing, and I’ve always loved the freedom of writing. I was also never pressured to use a formula with my students because I teach at the college level, but I have used some traditional ideas like having one thesis. Spandel’s piece taught me that even that can be limiting.  I love her focus on students and how teaching formulas does a disservice to their potential and the depth of their learning. Writing is so much more complex than formula would make it out to be.  She tells us, “Being yourself. Telling the truth. Taking a close look. Those are the things a writer cannot survive without. Technique is just frosting on the cake. We need to begin with our students, who they are, what they feel. Writing lives inside of us.” (p. 125) And to that I say, “That’s the triple truth, Ruth.”

The writing project has taught me so much that I cannot really express, even with the help of a Wordle and a jumbled, free-flowing essay. The Writing Project told us from the very beginning that “teachers learn best from other teachers,” and that philosophy is perhaps my biggest takeaway. We need each other as much as our students need us, and we grow so much more together than we would by ourselves. From raising our hands silently to gather back together, to doing a fireworks cheer or echoing, “Yessity Yes,” to “Classity Class,” we worked together to make it work. It seems trite and predictable to end this way, but many thanks to my fellow fellows, to our writing mentors, and to Kathee and Kristie especially. Like a Wordle, we can move in random and unpredictable ways, going in different directions with different shapes and different colors, but I hope that for each of us the end-products will be beautiful, creative and unique.

Addendum:

This is the list that I put into Wordle, but I did repeat a few words that seemed more important to me like “collaborative learning”:

Active learning techniques– variations on jigsaw learning, planning a gallery walk, call-and-response techniques for classroom management, including elements of discovery, creating an image box, looping free-writes, inquiry-based learning, expanding student choice, Author’s Chair

Writing lessons – Write to learn, writing as a process, writing as inquiry, the right to go beyond formula, the benefits of small writing workshops, peer feedback, mysterious stories

New technologies/technology in the classroom – wikis, Wordle, Google lit trips, Google docs, kinetic text, Animoto, VoiceThread, Glogster, SmartArt graphics, Troy Hicks *The Digital Writing Workshop*

Ideas for Wordle -- Review or preview content, Brainstorm and prewrite research topics and thesis ideas, make wordle word walls, create visually interesting poetry and word art

**Teaching Lore/Teaching in South Africa (revised for anthology)**

“A woman is like a teabag. You  
can’t tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.” ~ Eleanor  
Roosevelt

“Education is the most powerful  
weapon which you can use to change the world.” ~ Nelson Mandela

Teaching at Mmabatho High School in South Africa in 1993 was my first year teaching. Before that I had classroom experience as a teaching assistant for two different English teachers in a summer school program, and I also helped with grading (with three other TAs) for Robert Farris Thompson, a well-known art historian and professor of African American Studies at Yale. Consequently I had never been in charge of my own classroom, and I really hadn’t been trained as a teacher in my master’s program in African American Studies. I was essentially still a student with some knowledge about literature but very little knowledge about teaching techniques or classroom management. I remember very little about my classroom experiences that year, but it was a life-changing year, a year for many life lessons.

Mmabatho was the capital of a semi-autonomous homeland, Bophuthatswana, near the border of Botswana about three or four hours west of Johannesburg. It was part and parcel of the system of apartheid. The president of Bop, Lucas Mangope, was a conservative Christian who aligned himself with the white right-wing in 1994 to resist elections and preserve his power, a position which of course ultimately failed. However, in 1993 Mmabatho High seemed neutral in this swirl of politics, an ivory tower with high ideals. Mmabatho High was proud of its reputation for academic excellence, and our students regularly competed in national competitions. Students were required to take an entrance exam to qualify for admission, and most were overachievers. About half of our students boarded, and the process of living together built up school spirit. It is hard for me to pick out one student in particular who changed my teaching world that year. Instead it was a succession of experiences and so many students impressed me.

The first dramatic experience happened in February when a history teacher unwisely shut down a school dance over two hours early because students from other local high schools had crashed the party. His speech shutting down the dance was unfortunately very judgmental and alienating, emphasizing the exclusionary side of Mmabatho High. He made the local students feel unwelcome and unequal and then proceeded to call the police. The homeland police then unwisely harassed our own students in the parking lot who needed to wait for their parents to pick them up. The police had dogs and forced our students out into the street and away from the school. I remember yelling in the face of a policeman to protest this bad decision as I tried to escort boarding students back to the hostels. I was nearly hysterical because it shocked me that the police would intimidate our own students with their dogs. To get to school from the hostel we had to cross two streets and take a path through a cul-de-sac, not a long walk but also not next door. Although I had no trouble moving in between the school and the hostel, I heard later that an Indian couple who served as hostel parents had been bombarded with rocks. Mr. Matthews and his wife had to run to escape the hostility of teenagers from the neighborhood. I also remember being escorted by students who were probably not from MHS. I think someone had witnessed my fierce anti-police stance which immediately made me their ally. That early in the school year I did not know the students well enough to consistently put names with faces. It was only later when I did get to know more students that I realized my escorts were probably the so-called interlopers who precipitated the end of the dance. Because of the attack on Mr. Matthews, the hostel manager, Mr. Van Wyk, a staunchly Marxist Afrikaner, organized the senior boys to patrol the hostel grounds with baseball bats and garbage can lids for shields. On that night I had an immediate opinion, and not a good one, about organizing and arming the students into a makeshift security force. Mr. Van Wyk, although a hardcore radical, was also ex-military.

Most of what I learned that year was learned out of the classroom, and the experiences are too many to describe here. I learned about school spirit, community and the complexities of South Africa’s race relations. In August that year, Amy Biehl, a white American Fulbright student was killed in a racially motivated attack, and six weeks later my friend Daniella was attacked in a copy cat attack on her school grounds in Cape Town. Daniella survived, but that experience shook me to the core. As a white woman in Black Studies, I have frequently been in racial spaces I was not “supposed” to be in, and I’ve usually been treated with great patience and tolerance even when I was not always welcome. Daniella’s strength in the aftermath of that attack amazes me still. She went back to teaching only two weeks after the attack, and her parents came from the States to support her recovery. I think I learned the importance of perseverance that year and the power and talent that students have. I remember trying to sit in on an SRC, a student representative council, which was a lively meeting of all the students from the school. However, I was quickly asked to leave because teachers weren’t allowed to attend, not even a part-time teacher and volunteer from the U.S. Their decisions of self-governance had to be autonomous, and teachers were not allowed to even observe.

As an assistant hostel parent I lived with my students. Being on duty for 72 hours at a time meant I had to wake the students up at 6 am, say the prayer before meals, breakfast, lunch and dinner, proctor multiple study sessions in the afternoon and night, patrol the hostel grounds until 9 pm, and make sure the students turned out the lights at ten. The hostel had an ear-splitting air siren which announced various deadlines during the day telling us when to be in certain places. I could not always get the students to quiet down before meals, and I remember some girls once stole my neon orange-pink sneakers because they were mad at me for disciplining them in the hostel. (They knew I loved those sneakers!) I had to sometimes dig deep to find the strength to keep going that year, but I woke up every day grateful to be there and eager to learn. That year I fell in love with two things: South Africa as a whole and teaching as a profession. Mmabatho High was a very unique school, and 1993 was a very unique year. South Africans held their first democratic elections officially ending apartheid on April 27, 1994, four short months after I left. Looking back, all of our difficult experiences felt like the pains of giving birth and the dying out of the old. I saw the birth of myself as a teacher that year, but South Africa was trying to give birth to something much bigger.

*My full name is* ***Mindy Jo Torres****. I have been married to the most wonderful man for over four years and loving every minute. We have two dogs, both Labrador Retrievers, named Jack and Lilly and one cat Abby. That’s our little family. I have been teaching 9th grade at Fresno High School for four years. I started with struggling learners and now teach in the International Baccalaureate Middle Years program. There have been times when I have asked myself, is this really a job, I was having so much fun. As well as times where I have asked, are you sure this is what you want to do for the rest of your life? I do not know the answer to the last question just yet but I do know that when my freshman student, now a senior off to Santa Clara University, comes up to me, shakes my hand firmly (a skill I like to think I taught her) and says thank you for all you did for me, you taught me so much—that is my paycheck.*

**Go Deeper**

So how do you like teaching? People from all over my life ask me. My answer changes depending on the time of year. One thing has remained constant, it’s not like what I thought it was going to be, nor is it anything for which college prepared me. When new teachers respond like this, they’re usually responding to the discipline or administration ion or their school. When I answer it’s nothing like I thought, what I’m screaming inside is, it’s nothing like English/language arts is supposed to be. A summer and the Writing Project changed that for me.

When I walked into what would be my first of many laborious and “teaching to the test” English faculty meetings, I was clueless. I actually didn’t know what I was looking for in terms of planning, had I known, I would have run. In all reality though, I’ve learned there’s no need to run and if those of us who care and know something isn’t right leave, there will be no one left to inspire. Inspire, is just what the Writing Project has done. I am positive if we are teachers of the test, we will not inspire we will expire.

Kelly Gallagher finally said what I have been dying to say, I will not get to all the standards! When a respected teacher and author validated one of my deepest concerns regarding my career, I’m finally able to start looking at what else is out there, secretly knowing and being OK with the fact that “there will be standards I won’t teach.”

The writing project has shown me what else is out there. I want to be a teacher of deep thinking and consequently deep learning. Going deeper into writing will help students get there. Instead of planning to the test, I will be thinking, what are the writing experiences my students need?

What good is curriculum if it’s a mile wide and an inch deep? By slowing down and going deeper into writing, Gallagher reminds us, the payoff will be longer lasting. Longer lasting in that so much more of their learning will be retained if they care about their assignments. This can be done by simply giving students choice. I intend to implement this right away and in as many ways as possible. From quick writes like what bother me most is blank to the required writing discourse assignments that give them a couple possible avenues in which to explore.

Another meaningful assignment that allows student to critically think about their writing is the portfolio. They can be used for instruction or assessment. They can be focused on documentation or evaluation. Their contents can be defined by the students or by the teacher (Wiggins, 1998). There are so many possibilities but the overall focus for me as the teacher, and now TC, is the ability for students to go back and revisit, revise, rework their writing.

Go deeper.

**Paint Brush**

I am instrumental in both the figurative and literal sense.

Without me, the artist cannot  
explore  
communicate  
share  
hope  
dream  
live.

With a hand wrapped lightly around me as one strums a guitar, experience pours into me

And I

wait for it

While sitting in the metal jar,  
My bristles dry and crunch when bent.

Oil  
is so much better than  
water,  
much deeper and permanent

Colors and strokes that punch you in the face.

The first stroke is so intimidating  
It could really turn out to be anything  
Oh! That line was way too long, ruined the piece for sure.  
But wait…  
This line changes everything

Moving now, enjoying the ride

Even though it’s not me who decides.

**Rindi Stone**

Dear Rob, July 7, 2011

One of my most prized possessions is the box of letters that you wrote to me while we were dating. I was so nervous about writing you that first time. It was a huge risk for me. I was thrilled when I heard back from you. Our correspondence became the highlight of my year living in another state and my confidence to keep trying while trudging through my early college years. That first letter changed my life. It allowed me the chance to get to know you, and to share myself with you.

It has been so long since I have written a letter to you. I have had this idea for a while, but it has taken me some time to be able to do it. I wanted to write to you and tell you about our kids. It’s been so long since you have seen them. They have grown up so much. They continue to exacerbate me and amaze me all at the same time.

Our son is going to be 13 this month. He is definitely turning into a teen. He is an authority on a multitude of subjects and thinks he can argue his way out of everything. He has braces now, and keeps his hair shaved close. His favorite hobbies are making his sister screech and trying to get out of doing chores around the house. He is smart and generous. He is so much like you, he can enter a room where he doesn’t know a soul, find a subject he has in common with someone, and leave with a new best friend. He makes friends easily and has a wicked sense of humor. When he is in trouble, he gives me that same crooked grin and I remember how lucky I am to have a perfect portrait of you. He misses you so much. He spends “guy time” with his uncles and enjoys hunting and fishing. He has already mastered the art of telling fish tales about the one that got away. He stays busy playing football and baseball. Currently, he is lobbying for a cell phone. He thinks he needs a phone as he heads off to middle school. We are still in negotiations about that one.

Our daughter is nine. She is very different from our son. When she is around people she doesn’t know she sits back and observes. Only when she feels comfortable does she initiate conversation. She is careful about choosing her friends. After she lets someone in, they’re in. She is independent and strong. She works hard at mastering tasks and tackles new obstacles with an amazing amount of determination and perseverance. She is much like you in that she sees a job to be done, she takes it on, and puts all her effort into it. She commits herself to a project and doesn’t understand when others don’t put forth the effort to be successful. She is stubborn and willful, which is sometimes hard to deal with in a nine year old. However, I think those same qualities will serve her well as an adult. She uses the same fierceness on the soccer field, but is the image of grace and beauty on the stage.

I guess what I want you to know is that our children are ok. We have amazing, strong, resilient children. They ask me the most profound questions and they never let me off the hook for telling them every detail. I tell them stories about our life together. They ask to hear the same stories over and over again. Our lives are busy and full, but we talk about you everyday. I tell them how much you loved them and how proud you are of them. I also tell them that they are so lucky to have had a Dad that cared about them so much. Some kids never get to experience that kind of love and understanding. They had you for a short time, but have memories to treasure for a lifetime.

I miss you.

I love you.

Rindi

My Life as a Girdle

When I was a young girl I remember watching with fascination when I realized my grandmother was wearing a girdle. She never revealed it or showed it to me, but occasionally I would catch a glimpse of it. My grandma was a tough old broad who was fiercely independent. She out lived my grandfather by many years and lived on a ranch by herself until the age of 85. She wasn’t warm and fuzzy. She was tall, strong and to me seemed fearless. She was always in control and a force to be reckoned with. I admired her for her independence and strength, but I also wondered what she was really like beneath the rigid exterior.

Throughout history girdles have maintained an air of strength and mystery. Girdles were popular with women in the 20’s through the late 60’s. They were worn to create a controlled figure that was seen as respectable and modest. In Literature girdles were portrayed as magical and giving power and strength. Girdles are even worn by football players to keep pads in place.

As I grow older I am beginning to realize that I too have a rigid exterior. I often hide the soft stuff. My family and close friends know me to be strong and supportive. I am often the one who they turn to for advice. I have boning that keeps my posture tall even on days when I would like to be a slouchy slob. My hook and eye closures are sometimes a little tight and cause discomfort. Other days they are loose and need more control. My mid section is smooth. I keep everything held together until I explode and it comes spilling out the top. I try to hide my flaws and only reveal them to those whom I can trust.

So I am a girdle. Not as racy and decorative as my cousin the brassiere, not as free and whimsical as my sister the slip, not as fun sounding as a pair of Spanx. I do my job. I maintain a smooth calm silhouette. I use elastic to stretch when needed, but I remain held-in and held together.

***Susan Jensen*** *has been a full-time English instructor at* [*College of the Sequoias*](http://cos.edu/) *for 9 years. She is also the Basic Skills Coordinator at the school. She and her husband, Don, have three children and 3 grandchildren. They farm walnuts, persimmons, citrus and tree fruit in the Visalia, CA area. In her spare time, Susan writes short-story fiction.*

**Wolfman Jack**

Our farmhouse sat hidden, surrounded by alfalfa and grapes.

At night hay balers crept along, swhoosh-clunk, swhoosh-clunk creating neat rows.

He worked 10 hours a day welding machinery.

I worked at home with baby, writing at the Formica kitchen table – short story, poetry, anything that appeared.

Friday nights we laid an old army blanket, bologna, beer and baby on the front lawn.

Philco radio filled with D batteries scanned until its long rabbit-ears found him.

“Ayeee boys and girls, it’s the Wolfman” he howled from an outlaw station somewhere in Mexico.

Creedence, Smokey and Orbison filled the darkness while baby laughed at the stars.

Banned by the government, he was out in the ether, sending us his peace and love.

Children with their baby, living on the land; broken men returning from Vietnam; hunted protesters hiding in burned-out buildings, all on the same wave with the Wolfman.

**A Tale of Two Colleges**

Twelve years ago I taught English at Cuesta College in San Luis Obispo for one semester. After a few weeks, the head of the English department asked me if I would like to join a few of the instructors for lunch to discuss pedagogy and I gratefully accepted. As I entered the cafeteria six instructors sat around a table. When I sat down, no one looked at me. The department chair finally introduced me and each person mumbled a reply.

Then one woman said, “I thought we weren’t going to have any outsiders at our lunches.”

The department chair replied, “Since Susan has recently graduated, I thought we could all discuss some new pedagogical ideas they are teaching in graduate school; we could have a good conversation.”

Again, everyone concentrated on his or her food, not looking at me. Then one instructor got up, picked up her lunch and left. It was one of the most uncomfortable hours of my life, sitting there talking to the department head while everyone else was stonily silent.

This saga began two years after I earned my master’s degree in English: Composition Theory. My husband and I found ourselves in a unique place in our lives. He had just sold his family’s business that had existed for 100 years and I was without a job. A friend of ours had a hilltop home right across from Morro Rock and asked us if we would like to house-sit for 5 months while he left the country for work. For several years we had discussed selling our Fresno home and becoming farmers again, but we were not quite ready to do that so we decided “why not”? Our home sold quickly; we stored most of our belongings and headed to the central coast.

All through graduate school my goal was to get a full-time teaching position at the community college level and Cuesta College, just down Highway 1 from Morro Bay, was my dream school. Nestled between the Pacific Ocean and the always-green foothills of the coastal range, Cuesta’s campus is a copy of an old Spanish mission. Ever since our son graduated from Cal Poly, we had wanted to live in that area. So, as soon as we moved in to our temporary home, I went over to Cuesta and applied for an adjunct position in the English department. A week later I was hired and given two classes. In addition, to pick up a little more money, I also applied at Alan Hancock Community College in Santa Maria, about 45 minutes south of Cuesta, where I was also given two English classes.

The focus of my desire was always Cuesta so, at first, Alan Hancock meant nothing more to me than an additional salary. Over the next five months, my perception of these schools would be completely changed forever.

My first clue of the prevailing campus atmosphere was the differing attitudes of the students at each school. The majority of Cuesta’s student body was affluent. Generally, students there fell into two distinct categories. The first were students who had just graduated from high school and came to the area from other parts of California, especially the San Joaquin Valley, to get away from home and enjoy the party life of the area. The other group of students was those who had a chip on their shoulder because they had applied to Cal Poly but were not accepted and were at Cuesta just biding their time until they could get in. In all honesty, there were some very dedicated students, but they were certainly in the minority.

Alan Hancock students were very different. The Santa Maria area is very much like the San Joaquin Valley, primarily agricultural and industrial. Most of the students on this campus came from blue-collar families or had parents who worked as laborers in the fields. These students came to the community college much less prepared for academic work than the Cuesta students, but their attitudes were much more positive.

Not only did these schools have contrasting student bodies, each campus’s collegiality was completely different. During my interview at Cuesta, I was told that the full-time instructors and the adjuncts had different prep rooms where I could use a computer and/or make copies but we were not allowed to enter or use the full-time instructors’ lounge or copy center. As I walked the halls to my rooms, I politely smiled at several instructors but none would make eye contact with me. This was my continual experience with faculty the whole semester at Cuesta.

However, my reception at Alan Hancock could not have been more different. On my first day of class, I was in the joint copy room getting ready for class. Every person in there, whether adjunct or full-time instructor, introduced themselves and welcomed me to the campus. They asked if I had any questions and were eager to show me around. Four times during that first week, I would be teaching in front of my class and an instructor would walk in, each with the same message.

“Hi Susan, I’m professor Jim Thompson. I don’t mean to interrupt your class, but I just wanted to say how glad I am that you’re teaching here. Please let me know if I can help you in any way. And students (he said addressing the class) please make Ms. Jensen welcome and study hard for her.”

During the second month of classes, I received a written invitation for coffee with the Alan Hancock president. He had arranged a small reception for the Language Arts division, including all adjunct instructors. There I joined about 20 people, was warmly greeted at the door by one of the vice presidents and taken directly to meet the president. He was genuinely interested in how I came to the Santa Maria area and encouraged me to consider returning the next semester. I was stunned by this behavior that was so completely opposite of my experience at Cuesta.

How do two colleges only a few miles apart on the map develop such different atmospheres? I believe the culture of a work environment begins at the top, in this case with each college president. Lack of mutual respect on a personal and professional level permeates the faculty of Cuesta College. It is ironic that, in such a beautiful and seemly peaceful setting, there is no peace for the faculty. And, even today, this college environment has not changed. Last fall a dean from College of the Sequoias took a vice-president position at Cuesta. I happened to run into her at a conference in San Francisco this spring and she told me that Cuesta has the most toxic environment she has ever worked in.

And how did Alan Hancock build such a warm and positive culture in an area that does not match the beauty and tranquility of the Cuesta area? Administration, faculty and staff seem genuinely happy to be at work, to see their students and to interact with each other. This attitude begins at the top of the administration, attracting other positive people to the campus and soon a college reputation is built around this collegiality.

My perspective on the community college teaching profession has been forever changed by these experiences. A college is shaped by the attitudes of the people who work and teach there, not by its outward appearance. I lost one dream but gained a clearer perspective of the kind of college I wanted to be a part of as a full-time instructor.

In her fourth year of teaching at Madera South High School in the Central Valley of California, **Kimberly Minard** teaches honors sophomore English, junior English and senior Expository Reading & Writing. Born and raised in the foothills of Yosemite, Kimberly moved to sunny San Diego, CA briefly, and before anyone could blink, left to settle near home in Fresno, CA. She graduated from California State University, Fresno with her bachelor’s in English Literature and is currently working on her master’s degree in the same field. In between writing her own papers and grading her students’ work, Kimberly teaches others how to knit, writes sporadically on her [*blog*](http://aknittedfrenzy.wordpress.com) and cooks with her husband on the weekends.

**Has Silent Reading in Classrooms Gone the Way of the Dodo?**

*“The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them.” ~Mark Twain*

I devoured books as a kid. Living on 6 acres of land in the middle of practically nowhere will do that to a child. I read everything from poetry to Nancy Drew to Christopher Pike and RL Stine to the Babysitter’s Club. I read the back (and sides and front) of the cereal box every morning. I read magazines and the funnies out of the newspaper. Words were my constant companions. It helped that my parents were voracious readers as well. Saturday or Sunday obligation-free afternoons could find my mom reading romances in the library, my dad methodically going through the newspaper or his latest mystery in the family room, me lying on my bed rereading one of many paperbacks I owned and my brother… well, he was the non-reader of the house as a kid (but now he reads constantly.)

When I started teaching secondary English, I naively believed that my students would have the same literary upbringing that I had. How shocked was I that few of my students knew what fairy tales were or those that hadn’t cracked a book in their entire high school career. My solution was to implement silent reading on prescribed days for 15-20 minutes. My students could choose any book they wanted… biographies of their favorite sports hero or celebrity, fiction, manga, etc. I stopped short of magazines because the idea was to engage them in reading longer pieces.

My rationale for silent reading was to encourage my students to reach those 2 million words the CA state content standard says they will do by the end of high school. Kelly Gallagher states in his book “Readicide,” that underprivileged children can begin kindergarten behind their average classmates by 32 million words. By third grade, these same students are one million words behind their peers. By sixth grade, they can be as far as three grade levels behind in reading (32). Students that come from print-poor homes need to be reading at school. But all too often, the administration is not behind efforts to bring in books and silent reading.

I know from my own experience and from various experts on reading that reading increases vocabulary and reading comprehension. The biggest component in my rationale was that by allowing students to choose their books elicited buy-in from them. By reading books they find interesting, students will increase their own comprehension and vocabularies almost painlessly. If they don’t like their book, they can drop it and choose another. Students read for the entire time allotted. Homework, binder reshuffling, whispering or texting is not allowed. Most importantly though, I read with my students. Teacher modeling of silent reading is often pushed aside in favor of grading papers or lesson planning during that quiet time. But “if the teacher models, the students follow,” rings true (Hopkins). If my students see that I am reading alongside them, they know how serious I am about silent reading and that I enjoy it (I’ve been known to laugh out loud while reading or gasp in shock.) One student even remarked how involved I seemed to be in my book and that encouraged her to read more. Most of my students don’t know how to even choose a book to read or opt for the slimmest novel. I’ve slowly been collecting young adult and classic novels to offer to my students. When I introduce new additions to the collection, I will read them the titles and the blurb on the back cover. Sometimes I will also read an excerpt.

Inevitably, the books that I just introduced will be snapped up immediately. Are they always loved? No. But they are attempted to be loved.

Unfortunately, my attempt at silent reading that first year of teaching was vetoed by my then vice-principal. He saw it as babysitting and forbade any silent reading. At that point, my students had been reading silently for a few weeks but were angry at not being able to read in class. Most of my students held jobs after school, took care of siblings or their own children, participated in sports and/or clubs and did not have time to read on their own. The short amount of time I allotted toward silent reading was all they had. But I was not allowed any longer and I certainly did not want to push buttons or step on toes that could fire me as I was teaching on a special permit until I could finish my credential. My department chair fought valiantly for silent reading but her efforts to change his mind were also thwarted. So I stopped the silent reading and saw my student’s level of interest in mandated reading drop considerably.

As a lifelong reader, I felt caustic toward anyone not in favor of silent reading in the classroom. Not the best stance for a new teacher but reading is my passion. Readers are writers. Writers are readers. Neither can exist without the other. I continued reading about silent reading initiatives and the importance of them. I took a cue from the ever-changing teaching strategies and renamed “SSR” in my classroom to “Independent Reading (IR.)” I discovered Gallagher’s book as well as several other articles advocating reading in school. It sounds so obvious, reading in school, but in our test-laden schools these days, reading for pleasure is a thing of the past. Reading to the test and reading till our eyes turn to sawdust. My theory is if a student has an interest (and they all have at least one) they can enjoy that interest through books. In turn, that interest can lead to another and can lead to what they’re studying in school. For example, a former student was immensely interested in World War II. But he wasn’t able to read much about it on his own. What he knew was only through his history classes. Through silent reading, he was able to read biographies of the generals, a fictional account through the eyes of a soldier and greatly deepened his understanding of WWII. This led to greater understanding in his history class as better articulation in his writing for my class.

Though a school-wide silent reading period may never see the light of day in my school district, I continue to allot time in my classroom that is devoted to silent reading. I now have a growing classroom library of books especially for my students. Each year, more students tell me that before my class, they had never read an entire novel. But now they have perpetual list of books they want to read.

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**Teacher Lore**

Tears didn’t fall until 3:16 p.m. I pulled tissues out of my desk and wiped the tears away. Then a colleague walked in and saw my red eyes, puffy face, sniffly nose. Panic crossed his face. He was the one that recommended I apply for the open position of English teacher back in July. Later, he would tell me that he had been afraid in that moment, afraid that I wouldn’t make it. In that moment, on the first day of my teaching career, with crumpled tissues surrounding me on the desk and floor, I wasn’t sure I was going to make it either.

My friend called me in July about the opening at the high school he taught at and the timing could not have been more perfect. I just gave my two week notice at my joe job days prior to that phone call. Nearing the end of my credential classes, I had yet to step foot inside a classroom. I wanted to leave my desk job and hopefully start my internship. But I was having trouble passing one section of the CSET. A lot of trouble. But I gave notice anyway and figured I would substitute teach until I passed and could secure an internship.

But then John called. “Are you still looking to teach this school year?” he asked.

“Uh, yah,” I said, my ears perking up.

“Well, my vice-principal needs an English teacher and I thought of you.”

“Great!” I said. “What now?” John said he would pass on my number to the vice-principal. Hours later, his secretary called with an interview date and time. I thought this was the best, shiniest present anyone could give me. I interviewed with the vice-principal a few days later and a few days after that I was hired. Me. Green as a new blade of grass me. Without prior teaching experience, not even student teaching or substituting – me.

Two weeks later, I stood palms sweating, voice wavering in front of my first class of the day. They were freshmen and most likely just as scared as me. My two sections of senior classes would nonchalantly stroll into class later. They weren’t scared. But their icy stares scared me. I handed out syllabi and getting-to-know-you surveys. I panicked when my first class of seniors showed up and there weren’t enough desks. No one told me about ‘leveling,’ the weeks long process of reshuffling kids so that didn’t have more than the maximum number of students in their classroom. I didn’t know it could take weeks until that was sorted out. Not only that but I botched so many student names (Jenehira? Jauregui? Josue?) that my ears resembled tomatoes. Same mispronunciations in every class period and the tomatoes kept ripening.

Maintenance emailed and told me no more desks for two more weeks. So I perched a few students on the non-functioning AC unit, gave one my desk chair and instructed another to sit at the podium. Forty three teenage bodies in one tiny humid classroom. I quietly reminded myself to stock my desk with Febreeze as soon as possible.

By the time 7th period rolled around, I was practiced enough in my first day speech that I welcomed that last group of freshmen in with a great big clenched grin. One more period. My 7th period students were the kind that every teacher on campus wanted out of their class and were consequently dumped into one section of English. My class. Half the students were late and loud about it that first day. They all seemed to know each other pretty well and they wouldn’t stop talking or harassing each other. I couldn’t get a word in between the girls cackling and the boys howling. Male students far outnumbered the females and a few roamed freely while I attempted to introduce myself and hand out the syllabus. Classroom management? That wasn’t a course in my credential program.

They smelled my fear and greenness and preyed on it. They circled the wounded target and pounced repeatedly. Before the end of the longest 57 minutes of my life, my 7th period managed to talk back, mimic, laugh at and defy everything I said would be happening their first year in high school English.

One student bolted before the bell that day. The rest at least waited then raced out the door. Then I cried.

I couldn’t stop the tears. And I had to come back tomorrow.